

House Bill 263
January 29, 2015
Presented by Chas Van Genderen
House Fish Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Chas Van Genderen, Administrator for Montana State Parks, a division of the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks. I am here on behalf of the Director in support of HB 263. This bill would remove Madison Buffalo Jump from the Primitive Parks Act.

Basically, this simple bill would give the Parks system the opportunity to manage Madison Buffalo Jump State Park in a manner that allows better access within the park, and the opportunity to improve the visitor experience overall.

According to a 2010 Bureau of Business and Economic Research survey, visitors to Montana's park system spent approximately \$289,000,000 and supported 1600 tourism jobs. As our visitation continues to grow, so does that economic impact. Along with being good hosts and resource stewards, we need to provide good experiences. Montana's brand promise for state parks is that each one will be significant, relevant, and accessible. The park is not accessible to the handicapped or the elderly and this bill will help us address that.

Two years ago we asked the public if Madison Buffalo Jump should continue to be a park. Overwhelming they said yes. This is one of Montana's top ten most significant archaeological sites, but you cannot access the interpretive area without walking up a steep and rocky hill. We need to build a small road and current law does not allow it.

Currently, with big highway signs, we encourage both Montanans and our guests to get off of I-90 and visit the park, but when they arrive there is almost nothing there except a welcome sign and an empty parking lot.

The existing interpretive area is ¼ mile away, nearly invisible, and inaccessible at the top of a hill that the elderly or disabled cannot reach. Once you get there, the view and information is marvelous, but the lack of access does not meet public expectations or enhance the site. This park tells the story of what buffalo jumps are, why they are historically important, and how Montana is proud to preserve them. The Primitive Parks Act does not protect this park. In fact it hinders the opportunity to fully support, access, and enjoy this public place.

If we are to support local communities, enhance our economy and accommodate families that want to learn about their history, we need to improve this park by taking it off the primitive parks list. I urge your support of HB 263, and I will be available for questions.

HB 263
Van Genderen
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